

HOWARD KIMELDORF INTERVIEWS FOR REDS OR RACKETS?

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AL Langley, Elmer Mevert, Russell Miller of ILWU Local 13

INTERVIEWEES: AL Langley, Elmer Mevert, Russell Miller

INTERVIEWERS: Howard Kimeldorf

SUBJECTS: 1934 STRIKE; SHIPYARD WORKERS; WHITE BOATS; INTERNATIONAL LONGSHOREMEN ASSOCIATION 3882; BOILERMAKERS UNION OF CANADA; PAUL WARE; JOE RYAN; DICKIE PARKER; INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BRIDGE, STRUCTURAL, ORNAMENTAL AND RESTRUCTURING IRON WORKERS OF CANADA LOCAL 126; ELMER BRUCE; GREEN CARD; BOB WILSON; 1923 REDNECK STRIKEBREAKERS; ILWU LOCAL 13, SAN PEDRO; FRISCO; REDWOOD CITY; KU KLUX KLAN; ANTI-UNION ACTIVITIES; LEFT-WING THINKING; RIGHT-WINGERS; INDUSTRIAL SHIPYARD WORKERS UNION; COMPANY UNION; 1936 STRIKE; LABOR'S NON-PARTISAN LEAGUE; COOKS AND STEWARDS UNION; DIRTY DOZEN; HARRY BRIDGES; CIO; JOHN L. LEWIS; CRAFT UNIONS; JUNE 16 AGREEMENT; MATT MEEHAN; BOB WILSON; NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD; DOCK SEAMEN; PAN-AMERICAN HIGHWAY; WAREHOUSE WORKERS; PACIFIC COAST MARITIME INDUSTRY BOARD

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[00:00:00] **HOWARD KIMELDORF:** Kimeldorf with Al Langley, Elmer Mevert, Russell Miller, on August 14, 1985. Why don't you just each say your name so I can make sure that I'm picking you up.

[00:00:10] **AL Langley:** Al Langley.

[00:00:11] **HOWARD:** And how do you spell the last name again? I want to make sure I've got this down. There's no E in there, is there?

[00:00:17] **AL:** L-A-N-G-L-E-Y.

[00:00:20] **HOWARD:** L-E-Y? I misspelled it throughout the whole text. Okay. And do you want to spell your name?

[00:00:28] **RUSSELL MILLER:** Russell Miller M-I-L-L-E-R.

[00:00:31] **HOWARD:** And how many L's in Russell?

[00:00:33] **RUSSELL:** Two.

[00:00:33] **HOWARD:** Two. Okay. And Elmer?

[00:00:36] **ELMER MEVERT:** Elmer Mevert. M as in Mary, E, V as in Victor, E-R-T.

[00:00:43] **HOWARD:** Okay, that one I got. Maybe I'll ask Russ first. When did you first come onto the waterfront? Do you remember the year, approximately?

[00:00:53] **RUSSELL:** Oh, god I was [?from Norville High School?], 1929, when I first started to work the white boats over there. Do you remember those white boats? That was my first job.

[00:01:04] **HOWARD:** What were working conditions like?

[00:01:06] **RUSSELL:** Well, you had to be young, you had to be fast and you had to be able to work. And there wasn't any such thing as working conditions. You did what the boss told you and if you didn't, why, out the gate.

[00:01:24] **HOWARD:** Did you participate in the '34 strike at all?

[00:01:26] **RUSSELL:** Yeah.

[00:01:28] **HOWARD:** What kinds of activities did you participate in, do you remember?

[00:01:32] **RUSSELL:** Picket duty.

[00:01:34] **HOWARD:** Okay. And what did you guys do, again, just to refresh my memory, in the '34 strike? Elmer?

[00:01:40] **ELMER:** I was on picket duty at various docks, and a lot of my activity was in the soup kitchen, going around. I picked up bakery pans and stuff like that from different places around San Pedro. I remember one bakery gave me a bunch of pans. Took them down to the soup kitchen. That was a lot of my duties. But I did do some picket duty on the line.

[00:02:08] **HOWARD:** How about you, Al?

[00:02:10] **AL:** I was on the soup kitchen, too, and I was washing dishes and cooking. And after, when we got through with the soup kitchen at noon—I went in at 5:00 in the morning and worked till noon—in the afternoon, I would get with the beef squad, go to LA to the employment offices, and watch and see for the guys that went into the employment office, and if they came out of the office and went uptown, we would follow them. They

had to go to the steamship office to get money to get down to the dock. We would follow them and if we could catch them, we would beat the shit out of them and take the money away from them. If we missed them, then we would call down, and there would be somebody to meet them at the PE [Pacific Electric Railway] depot; either that, or at Dominguez Junction on the PE cards. Then, if I had nothing else to do, why, I'd go down and do picket duty.

I didn't belong to the union then. I belonged to the shipyard workers. But they loaned me and five more guys to the—at that time it was the ILA [International Longshoremen Association]—to do picket duty for them so their guys could be on the line. See, we weren't allowed on the line. But we were in the soup kitchen and uh, part of us would go and pick up vegetables and bum the farmers for pigs and calves and chickens and eggs and everything they could get a hold of.

[00:03:52] **HOWARD:** Why did they select you to loan?

[00:03:54] **AL:** Well, there was nobody in this town ever heard of a union before. In 1923, I belonged to the Boilermakers in Canada. I went to Victoria and they told me I was too goddamn young. [laughing] I was only 20 years old. They were building a line from Vancouver to Victoria—a water line—and they wanted boilermakers. So I joined Boilermakers and went over there. "Ah, you're too young." They wanted an old guy. And then, in '28, I joined the Structural Iron Workers, and I was President of Local 126, International Association of Bridge, Structural, [Ornamental] and [Restructuring] Iron Workers of Canada for, oh, four or five years, until I come down here.

So, I knew something about labor unions, and most of these other people around here never heard of a union. It was something that, you know, was—well, when I first came here in '34, I went down and asked these people, "Where can I find the union?" They damn near threw me out of their businesses, you know? They wouldn't allow a union in this town. And these people didn't know what a union was, so when they went on strike in '34, the shipyard workers got a general charter, a labor charter. That was like the CIO now. It encompassed everybody. We kept that for about a year, and then the Boilermakers and these other guys—the Plumbers and Steamfitters—started to raise hell, they jerked the charter away from us, and we didn't have no charter.

But we had an organization, a nucleus. We had a union, but we didn't have any charter, we didn't have nothing. But we had a president—you know, we had regular officers and everything—and when the ILA 3882 came over and asked for pickets—because, you know, they didn't have too damn many men here, about 1,500 men on the waterfront at that time—why, they needed more people to help. So they said, "We won't put these guys on no picket lines where they can get hurt. We want them to help in the kitchens and pick up food and everything like that for us."

[00:06:45] **HOWARD:** Were you a member of the union then, at that time, before the strike, Elmer?

[00:06:49] **ELMER:** Was I a member of a union?

[00:06:51] **HOWARD:** Of the ILA? Or were you working casual?

[00:06:55] **ELMER:** Well, I signed up for the union.

[00:06:58] **HOWARD:** Uh-huh.

[00:06:59] **ELMER:** But in the meantime, this Elmer Bruce became President, and he had it in for me for some reason, because I was supposedly messing around on the left-wing fringes and all that stuff. Like I said, I was just a kid.

[00:07:14] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[00:07:16] **ELMER:** And so, when they took all the guys into the union in 1934 and they took their oath, I was kept out. I was forced to work on what they called a green card. Remember the green card?

[00:07:33] **AL:** Yessir.

[00:07:34] **ELMER:** So actually, I didn't get initiated until March '35. Same as . . .

[00:07:40] **AL:** . . . Bob Wilson.

[00:07:41] **ELMER:** Yeah.

[00:07:42] **HOWARD:** How about you, Russell? Were you in the union before the strike?

[00:07:44] **RUSSELL:** No, not until after the strike was over. They didn't have too many members at that time in the union, people like Paul Ware. They're the ones that organized it.

[00:07:58] **HOWARD:** Paul Ware was a Wobbly and your dad was a Wobbly. Were the Wobblies in the leadership of organizing the ILA at this port, or do you know?

[00:08:09] **RUSSELL:** No.

[00:08:11] **AL:** No, they wasn't leaders, but I guess they helped organize.

[00:08:14] **ELMER:** I've got a few ideas. Now, I never knew for sure whether my dad carried a Wobbly card. I never really knew for certain. From things he said throughout the years, he probably did, but I never saw it myself personally. And getting back to this other point, you must remember that a lot of men that were around in '34 were originally strikebreakers in 1923, which consisted of a bunch of rednecks that were brought in from the South, and all that stuff, primarily basically anti-union, wouldn't you say?

[00:08:57] **AL:** Right.

[00:08:57] **ELMER:** And those were the kind of people I had to buck. Now, my dad was a union man ever since he was able to work, and guys like Paul Ware and Joe [?Bare?] and those guys. In the meantime, you had guys that joined the union, the old ILA, but they were sinking like the Joe Ryan [corrupt ILA president] bucks. Right? Like Pedro Pete and all those guys. But it was a difficult time for the people of San Pedro. I mean, they wanted a real union. Like I said, these holdovers from the '23 fiasco were still around. And a lot of them were bosses. Lots of them were bosses because they, well, they were just bosses. Because they were rednecks to start with, and they had no concept of what a union was.

[00:09:52] **HOWARD:** Yet there were Wobblies around, too, right?

[00:09:54] **ELMER:** Oh, there were Wobblies, but they were very quiet. It was a very quiet period for the Wobblies for 10 years, but they were still around. But for strictly economic reasons, they had to keep quiet. Is that right, Al?

[00:10:11] **AL:** Right.

[00:10:13] **ELMER:** If you were single, they could drift off someplace. But a lot of these guys had gotten married and had kids. So, like I say, for self preservation reasons, they just had to submerge the thing.

[00:10:25] **HOWARD:** All right. Let's move up to the strike itself, when Dickie Parker was killed. You must have all remembered that incident. What was going through your head? What were you thinking about at the time when you heard that news? Did it make an impact on you? Go around the table here.

[00:10:40] **AL:** No, because I had had some experience with strikebreakers. When I was in Canada, I belonged to the Structural Iron Workers. We had a strike up there and they had the same idea they did down here that the bosses did. Wherever there's a goddamn boss, they've got the same idea—that you were a dog, and they can shoot you or anything else as long as they had the money to pay a lawyer. I was surprised that there wasn't more people killed in '34 than what there actually was.

[00:11:25] **HOWARD:** How about you, Russ? Were you shocked by the news of him being killed?

[00:11:32] **RUSSELL:** Certainly I was shocked by it, but, I mean, I never knew him personally like Elmer here. You knew him but I never knew him personally, but I'd naturally be shocked by it.

[00:11:41] **HOWARD:** Do you remember what you were thinking at the time, what was running through your head? Were you angry at the employers? Did you feel indifference?

[00:11:48] **RUSSELL:** I was more angry at the cops than I was anybody else at the time.

[00:11:54] **HOWARD:** What about the level of violence in this port? It seems to me that strikebreaking was fairly effective here, that is to say they were able to work a lot of ships with scabs that they weren't able to do in other ports, and there were a lot of violent confrontations here. Is that true?

[00:12:11] **AL:** Well, this port had really good protection. The cops in this port and the guards were very effective. You couldn't get there. There's no way you could get there to confront these people. They were too well guarded. And that one ship over there where Parker was killed, that was a regular armory. Hell, the SWAT team today couldn't even [unintelligible] _____. And then that circus tent on the island, brother, they had a machine gun on four corners of that one, and spotlights. And they were well organized here better than any other port on the Pacific Coast, because it was the biggest port, for one thing. And these people, these bosses at the [?complex here were vicious?].

[00:13:19] **HOWARD:** Did they also maybe think the union was weaker here than the other ports?

[00:13:23] **AL:** Well, yes. I think they felt that they could break this port first, and then have a wedge. But I still don't know how in the hell this port ever hung together with the leadership that they had, with [?Peterson, Patterson?] and Bruce and [Edwardson?], those people here, because they were all ex-cons or felons or something like that. All of those guys were crooks. And how in the hell that these people—the men here, they'd never had any idea of unionism before—how they ever hung together and weathered out that strike, except it was desperation, the last hope of ever being able to work. They didn't know what decent conditions was.

[00:14:26] **HOWARD:** You raised a good point, how it is that the men were able to stay together throughout this ordeal.

[00:14:30] **AL:** That is something I don't know, and I've never been able to find out.

[00:14:34] **HOWARD:** Let me propose an idea. The degree of violence that was directed against them may have welded them into a solid mass. Does that make sense to you? That's one of the points that I argued in the dissertation.

[00:14:46] **ELMER:** No. I would say that amongst the real young men—

[00:14:51] **RUSSELL:** Yes. My first reaction when I heard that Dickie Parker was killed was shock, because actually, I was supposed to go on duty with him that night. But I had an old beat-up car that got repossessed that afternoon. Never even had a dime to get over on the Red Car to Wilmington, so I missed the action that night.

[00:15:17] **AL:** Well, of course, we didn't picket at night.

[00:15:19] **RUSSELL:** I went to high school with Dickie Parker. He dropped out before he graduated. I graduated. But we were good friends. But it was extreme shock. I was about 19 then. But I think that was one of the factors. And the crowning point was the raid on the scab ship. But as far as there was some covert action by individuals against certain scabs and so forth, like, I mean, it was all covert. But that was the only overt action of any significance was that raid on the scab ship.

[00:16:09] **AL:** That was the Diamond Head, wasn't it?

[00:16:11] **RUSSELL:** The Diamond Head.

[00:16:11] **HOWARD:** So what went through your mind when your friend from high school was murdered by the police, essentially in cold blood?

[00:16:17] **RUSSELL:** I felt completely frustrated because I knew what we were facing with these well-organized groups of cops. The Ku Klux Klan in San Pedro were in on the action, and the National Guard and all those people.

[00:16:32] **AL:** American Legion.

[00:16:34] **RUSSELL:** American Legion. Oh, they were the worst. Businessmen. You know, it's been rumored that a lot of businessmen were members of the Ku Klux Klan, and it's a very [?proud group?], too. Because these Klansmen would walk down 10th Street. They had their headquarters between [?Carrillo and Minor?] there.

[00:16:54] **AL:** Right.

[00:16:56] **RUSSELL:** They'd march through town terrorizing people.

[00:17:01] **HOWARD:** So, what did you think? Here you've got most of the respected citizens in law enforcement agencies against you. How do you perceive the democracy in the society, for instance? Is this a democratic country when that's going on, in your mind?

[00:17:17] **RUSSELL:** Like I said, I was still a young man and I hadn't formed any—basically, I was a union man, but I wasn't cognizant, actually. But now, in retrospect, I can see one of the reasons that we held together was the few left-wingers that were around. They were very clever at propagandizing the people.

[00:17:45] **HOWARD:** What did they say?

[00:17:46] **RUSSELL:** With the *Western Worker* [Communist Party newspaper in California] and the Workers' Alliance [coalition of socialist and communist unemployed workers organizations] and all those people, and the Industrial Shipyard Workers Union [Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America]. Remember?

[00:17:55] **AL:** Yeah.

[00:17:55] **RUSSELL:** They were called “red” and “Communistic” and all that stuff.

[00:17:58] **ELMER:** But it was still the left-wingers, what was left around, that were able, I think, to hold the guys together.

[00:18:12] **HOWARD:** What did they say? Do you remember?

[00:18:14] **ELMER:** They’d come out and they’d give us support. They would go out on their own and collect money and food and turn it over to us. But they would never take full credit for it.

[00:18:26] **RUSSELL:** They’d always work quietly so that they wouldn’t get thrown in the bucket. They had to work quietly, more or less undercover. And that’s one of the reasons today, in my estimation, that the unions all over the country and the shape they’re in, there’s no more left-wing thinking. Absolutely no more left-wing thinking. I may be entirely wrong.

[00:18:56] **HOWARD:** I think you’re probably on the track there. The question that I would raise then is, why did left-wing ideas seem reasonable at that time to you guys? Why were you willing to listen to them?

[00:19:05] **RUSSELL:** Well, because it appealed to our sense of dignity.

[00:19:10] **AL:** It was the last hope.

[00:19:12] **RUSSELL:** Yeah. They promised us dignity, to an extent, and better times, and real democracy in the union. That’s what they had to offer us. I mean, that’s what they used to present to us in their papers and their [?throwaways?], their pamphlets. Even their meetings. I attended a meeting one night with the Industrial Shipyard Workers Union. [unintelligible] ____?

[00:19:41] **AL:** Yeah.

[00:19:44] **RUSSELL:** And I recall that meeting. A lot of those guys in there were of Mexican descent.

[00:19:50] **AL:** Right.

[00:19:52] **RUSSELL:** And they had a difficult time speaking English. And we had an interpreter that, after the speeches were over, they would interpret it back to the membership who, like I said, were mainly of Mexican descent. And god, I sat back in amazement. I forget who the speaker was, but, god, when this—I don’t know what this interpreter told these guys after this speaker was through. But, god, they jumped up and I thought they were going to reorganize Pancho Villa’s army. [laughter] That was their reaction.

[00:20:29] **ELMER:** He must have given a hell of a speech.

[00:20:31] **AL:** Well, that’s what I belonged to first when I was doing picket duty for the longshoremen, that Shipyard Workers Union. And those guys, there was a lot of those Scotsmen and Englishmen in the shipyards.

[00:20:51] **RUSSELL:** [?Al Ashby?].

[00:20:52] **AL:** Ashby, yeah, old Al Lashby. [?Pop Woods?]. And most of these come from the Clyde Shipbuilding Works over in Scotland. And, of course, England and Scotland always had unions. They were only a dues-collection agency, but they were union. And these guys understood that. But the younger group in there

that came in during World War I, worked in the shipyard and hung on, they didn't know anything about a union. They wanted a company union.

At that time, a company union was legal before a national union was. And a company union was just that, a company union. They appointed all officers and they had to approve all of the policies. And that was the kind of union that those younger group in that [?aspect?] knew. We had some retired Navy men in there. Harry Farmer, retired Navy. And the guy that was President of the MEBA [Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association]. I don't remember his name now.

[unintelligible] ____.

But those guys were kind of the nucleus of this Shipyard Workers Union, and they were pretty goddamn militant. But what in the hell could we do? There was no shipyard building, no shipbuilding, no nothing here. Just old repairs. Things like [unintelligible] ____, the shipyard workers was just a dues-collection agency, too.

[00:22:57] **HOWARD:** Did the left-wing forces at all comment on violence? If they did, what did they say? Did they talk about the role of the police in the strike?

[00:23:07] **RUSSELL:** You mean the left-wing [?thing?]?

[00:23:11] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[00:23:11] **RUSSELL:** Well, it's been so long, like I told you over the phone, you forget a lot of things. I wish I had all those [unintelligible] _____. God almighty, it would be history itself.

[00:23:21] **HOWARD:** So do I. [laughing]

[00:23:23] **RUSSELL:** But they never incited the violence—that's one thing I knew—except maybe some provocateurs. There were some provocative [unintelligible] ____ come out. But it wasn't by these people that were trying to help us, I'm quite sure. I think they were all provocateurs.

[00:23:39] **AL:** They were planting stuff.

[00:23:41] **ELMER:** Yeah.

[00:23:44] **RUSSELL:** But the people that were helping—like I said, the left-wingers and so forth—they never, ever advocated violent action per se. Per se.

[00:23:58] **HOWARD:** Did they point out the role of the police in the strike and whose side they were on?

[00:24:02] **RUSSELL:** Oh, yes. Absolutely.

[00:24:03] **HOWARD:** Talk about its implications? Do you remember any of that?

[00:24:06] **RUSSELL:** Yes.

[00:24:07] **ELMER:** And they were continually trying to impress the membership that the way to finally defeat them was to stick together and form a real democratic union that would withstand all of these attacks. Now, at that time, there was a saying around here that anything south of Anaheim Street, east of Western Avenue, and west of . . . was it called Ford Avenue then?

[00:24:48] **RUSSELL:** Yeah.

[00:24:49] **AL:** Alameda Street.

[00:24:50] **ELMER:** Alameda Street. That was called “red territory.” South of Anaheim, west of Alameda Street, and east of Western.

[00:25:00] **HOWARD:** Meaning what?

[00:25:01] **ELMER:** That little enclave in there, it was called the “red area.”

[00:25:07] **HOWARD:** That’s where the radicals hung out or something?

[00:25:10] **AL:** That’s where the police was on to most of the time.

[00:25:13] **ELMER:** That included San Pedro, Wilmington, the western end of Terminal Island [unintelligible] _____. In there, that enclave where the waterfront was, that was called “red territory.”

[00:25:28] **AL:** That’s where the police was concentrated.

[00:25:30] **HOWARD:** Okay. And did you guys get harassed walking through there as individuals?

[00:25:37] **RUSSELL:** I got harassed a couple times. I was never beaten up then, at that time. That came later.

[00:25:49] **HOWARD:** When was that? Just curious.

[00:25:50] **RUSSELL:** One night I was out on—this was in an ensuing strike.

[00:25:53] **HOWARD:** '36?

[00:25:53] **RUSSELL:** Yeah. I was on the Speaker’s Bureau, and I’d just come back from Oxnard. And I was driving down Seventh Street by the old [?Fisherman?] Merchants Bank there on Seventh and Mesa, and a carload of goons had, of course, gone off the curb up on the sidewalk there, shouting insults and threats at me. Now, I don’t know who the guys were, whether they were an anti-red action within the union . . .

[00:26:40] **AL:** [unintelligible] _____.

[00:26:43] **RUSSELL:** . . . or goons. Because there were no goons around in '36.

[00:26:49] **AL:** I was on the goon squad for Local 3882 at that time.

[00:26:56] **RUSSELL:** But there was nothing—

[00:26:58] **AL:** But there was no other—if there was any action taken by individuals or a group of guys, like [?Rube?] and his brother . . . what the hell was their name? He went to the Navy yard actually, then he went to [unintelligible] _____. But those guys were anti-progressive. They were actually goons.

[00:27:27] **ELMER:** [unintelligible] _____.

[00:27:28] **RUSSELL:** But within the union.

[00:27:29] **AL:** Yeah.

[00:27:30] **RUSSELL:** They were within the union. See, they tried to terrorize anybody who was coming up with even the slightest left-wing thinking, or even inject any kind of a liberal politics into the union. I remember when Labor's Non-Partisan League was formed shortly after '36. Remember what a roasting that took?

[00:27:52] **AL:** Oh, hell, yeah.

[00:27:53] **RUSSELL:** God almighty. Because the Labor's Non-Partisan League was very effective.

[00:27:59] **AL:** Right.

[00:27:59] **RUSSELL:** I attended a convention in Sacramento with a bunch of guys from the [Marine] Cooks and Stewards Union. A bunch of us guys went up to Sacramento, and who should show up but Governor [Frank] Merriam, who called out the National Guard, begging for admission to the convention. Well, he never made it.

[00:28:27] **HOWARD:** What about the strike's impact on the men? I mean, everyone talks about the '34 men as a group. Are they a distinct group in the union, do you think? Did the '34 men constitute a distinct group?

[00:28:44] **ELMER:** I would say yes.

[00:28:45] **HOWARD:** Did they have a unity, a sense of cohesion?

[00:28:46] **ELMER:** I would say yes.

[00:28:46] **AL:** Yeah.

[00:28:47] **RUSSELL:** To an extent, until we weeded out the Dirty Dozen.

[00:28:50] **HOWARD:** Okay.

[00:28:51] **RUSSELL:** Up to that time, the old-type thinking, which was exemplified by the Dirty Dozen, was the controlling type of thinking in the union. And it wasn't until those guys got kicked out that we got guys . . .

[00:29:05] **AL:** A democratic union.

[00:29:07] **RUSSELL:** . . . come up like honest [recording stopped]

[END PART ONE/BEGIN PART TWO]

. . . 1923.

[00:29:14] **AL:** Right. The guy that was here—actually, all the guys that were working the waterfront at that time—[?Old Dean?], Paul Ware, [?M. A. Anderson?], [?Joe Bayer?], [?the Brakefields?], Eddie Thayne—those guys were looking for a decent way of life.

[00:29:52] **RUSSELL:** Right, with dignity.

[00:29:54] **AL:** Right, because most of them had been a little bit dignified in their work before. They had to have other jobs that they weren't considered a dog. Like on the waterfront here, you, as an individual, was an animal. That's the way that any of them bosses—that is, the top bosses, the superintendents—looked at the men

as animals to be used in any way [unintelligible] _____ it was [?possible?] to attain their ends. They didn't care whether they killed you or not.

[00:30:45] **ELMER:** No, you were just so much scum to get rid of.

[00:30:47] **AL:** Right. That's why they used to hire—any ex-boxer or fighter could always get a job on the waterfront because most of them had their brains knocked out before they got there. And they could use those guys to keep the rest of the guys in line.

A sailor that had jumped ship and was in danger of being deported or something, those guys would always get a job. What the hell was that big strikebreaker's name that used to have strikebreakers all over the whole country?

[00:31:30] **RUSSELL:** "Chowderhead" Cohen.

[00:31:36] **AL:** Yeah, and then there was another one. He had his men scattered in through here. The men that was here didn't know actually what a union was. Maybe Paul Ware and Rodine and M. A. Anderson. They were old Wobblies. They knew. But guys like Eddie Thayne or [?Brakefield?]. Brakefield and them was all miners from back in Alabama, Georgia. They knew something about a union. They knew what a union could do for them, and they were very good union men.

[00:32:23] **HOWARD:** Why did all the men stay together so long throughout that strike if so few of them knew about what a union could do and what it could offer?

[00:32:30] **AL:** It was the last resort. They had everything to win and nothing to lose. They had nothing to start with.

[00:32:40] **RUSSELL:** Here's the way I look at it, again, in retrospect. If it hadn't been for the left-wing thinking that [unintelligible] _____, it began to permeate, so to speak, especially the younger ones, not these old ex-finks from '23 and so forth. Even the Wobblies, they [unintelligible] _____ political action to an extent.

In 1934 to 1936 was a period of truth, so to speak. We had no conditions yet. The '34 strike only accomplished one thing. We had a union. The '36 strike was the one where we started fighting for conditions, '36 and after. But '34 to '36, like I said, was just an interim period of getting it to gel. It was, as I like to say, at the risk of being called chauvinistic, a Mexican showdown.

But it was only a period of consolidation for the union. There again, I maintain today that if it hadn't been for the few people of left-wing thinking, it would have never stuck together. Guys like [?Donnelly?], [?Honest Jonny Mitchell?] would have never been able to be elected to office.

[00:34:18] **HOWARD:** Did the level of violence that was directed against you allow people to look at the left-wing thinking and say, "Well, it's beginning to make a little sense now?" Did that have an impact?

[00:34:28] **RUSSELL:** The only bad thing about that was the newspapers would twist it around. The newspapers would twist it around and say that it was the left-wing that were instituting the violence.

[00:34:40] **HOWARD:** But the men didn't believe that, did they? The longshoremen. Did they believe any of that?

[00:34:45] **RUSSELL:** Some of them did. Quite a few of them did. And they bought this line. And anybody that dared give up their local and voiced some of these things that were being said by these left-wing leaders was looked upon as scabs, so to speak. I had a hell of a time at times, and so did other guys.

[00:35:10] **HOWARD:** What would you say that would draw these peculiar looks as you got up and said something that the left was saying? I'm just trying to figure out why anyone would have opposed the left in the middle of the 1934 strike.

[00:35:23] **RUSSELL:** Because there was too much to this.

[00:35:28] **HOWARD:** What was the left saying? What was the right saying, for instance, in '34?

[00:35:31] **RUSSELL:** Oh, the right was saying that everything was being run by Communist-led leaders, red leaders, Bolsheviks.

[00:35:41] **AL:** All you have to do is go out and get The Examiner [unintelligible] _____.

[00:35:45] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I've seen some of that stuff.

[00:35:47] **RUSSELL:** The Examiner was the Bible of those days. [unintelligible] _____ of that time. It was the Bible.

[00:35:54] **HOWARD:** But if the right was saying it was being led by Communists—that they were all Soviet agents or something—yet they were doing a good job of leading the strike, weren't they?

[00:36:03] **AL:** Not according to the men.

[00:36:06] **HOWARD:** What about the men?

[00:36:06] **AL:** We were kind of in a coma. I have to say that 90 percent of the men had no idea of what the outcome was going to be. They just had hopes. And at that time, with that Depression on, hope was all you had. All you had was hope because we'd been through four years of Depression, and it was getting awful, awful bad. These other guys, they never went through any of this stuff. They don't know what it was like to sit. You'd go out and you'd look for a job. You go all over the goddamned place. The same story wherever you went. Every day. Every day for three, four years. You become kind of paranoid that there was no goddamned hope, no place. It just couldn't happen.

Then, when this strike came, you had some action. You did have some action and it give you hope that even if you could get one day a week even, it was hope. It wasn't so much your working conditions for most of the men, although you had a bunch of men that worked steady all the time. They were the ones that was beaten down. But the guys that were on the outside, the extra men, they were the people that held this place together more than the steady men.

[00:38:10] **RUSSELL:** Right. I used to work. A ship would come in and you'd start working at 8:00 in the morning. You'd work for 24 hours, 36 hours, and the ship. Didn't make any difference how long [?it went?]. If they had 60 hours of work, you'd stay here and work that. The boss would come around about five or six hours and you'd get so damn hungry, you couldn't stand up. "Take 15 minutes and get something to eat. Be back in 15 minutes."

[00:38:47] **ELMER:** I've seen my dad go to work in a [unintelligible] ____ ship when he could take his break through the blackball. Those guys with the [blackball] always got the last pickings, if you didn't belong to the Blue Book.

[00:39:07] **RUSSELL:** That's what they called the Marine Service Bureau.

[00:39:08] **ELMER:** Yeah.

[00:39:09] **HOWARD:** They actually called it a Blue Book down here?

[00:39:11] **RUSSELL:** Yeah.

[00:39:12] **HOWARD:** They did in San Francisco. I didn't know they called it the Blue Book here, too.

[00:39:17] **ELMER:** That was [unintelligible] _____. My dad would go to work—looking back—we didn't know if we'd see him in 24 hours, 48 hours or 72 hours. You worked either till you dropped or that ship was finished.

[00:39:34] **HOWARD:** What credibility did the right-wingers have when they were attacking the strike leadership as being Communists? What did you think?

[00:39:39] **AL:** Because they were wanting all that work and they was getting the big paychecks.

[00:39:43] **HOWARD:** The right-wingers were?

[00:39:44] **AL:** Yeah.

[00:39:45] **HOWARD:** So, these right-wingers get up and they say, "This strike, which most of you guys support, is being led by Communists." Now, what did you think?

[00:39:51] **AL:** They were trying to take our jobs away.

[00:39:51] **HOWARD:** The Communists were trying to take your jobs away?

[00:39:51] **AL:** The steady men. The steady men would say, "These guys, these Communists, are trying to take our jobs away."

[00:39:56] **HOWARD:** Okay, and then the majority of you guys should have said, "Who cares about you steady men? We want to share the work."

[00:40:08] **ELMER:** Well, that didn't come until after '36. [unintelligible] ____ at all until '36. That's when we got rid of that.

[00:40:14] **HOWARD:** I guess what I'm trying to say is, what impact did red-baiting have during this? Did people buy into red-baiting?

[00:40:20] **RUSSELL:** Lots of them did.

[00:40:21] **HOWARD:** Wow. Even in '34?

[00:40:23] **RUSSELL:** Yeah. More so down here than any other site because of the concentration of these—again, I don't want to be called a chauvinist, but these Southerners, they were bad. Oh, they were bad.

[00:40:38] **HOWARD:** And they were mostly brought in in '23?

[00:40:39] **RUSSELL:** Right, right. They were bad. But the younger element wasn't too swayed. It was the intermediate group, maybe 10 or 15 years older or something like that.

[00:40:54] **HOWARD:** So, after the strike, after that '34 strike, and you purged the Dirty Dozen, right?

[00:40:59] **RUSSELL:** Right.

[00:41:00] **HOWARD:** Then you're left with these '34 men. Apparently, you've got all kinds of different politics among this group. You've got some rednecks, you've got some progressives, and you've got some people in the middle. Did they still hold together in the union as a generation?

[00:41:14] **ELMER:** Yes, because I'll tell you why. Even the little period between '34 and '36, there was somewhat more equal distribution of work. Everybody was getting a little hunk of the pie, and they could see those results. Rather than get one day a month, they'd probably get as high as two days a week. In other words, it was beginning to be distributed a little more equitably.

[00:41:43] **HOWARD:** What did you guys think of [Harry] Bridges? Did you hear of Bridges's name? You must have during the '34 strike.

[00:41:48] **RUSSELL:** Oh, yeah, sure.

[00:41:49] **HOWARD:** What did you think, Russell?

[00:41:50] **RUSSELL:** I thought he was the greatest labor leader that ever lived, myself.

[00:42:08] **HOWARD:** And then, at the same time, the papers were calling him the most Communistic and radical.

[00:42:08] **RUSSELL:** They tried to deport him three or four times.

[00:42:09] **HOWARD:** What do you think of that? They called him a Communist and you thought he was the greatest labor leader that ever lived.

[00:42:13] **RUSSELL:** Because I liked his leadership. He advocated democracy in the union. He was never appointed to any job. He always was elected to the job he had. He made it so that every local could elect their own union leaders and business agents. It wasn't like his [unintelligible] _____ on the payroll.

[00:42:45] **HOWARD:** Okay, I'm going to be the devil's advocate here. Let's pretend like we're back in 1934 and I say, "Hey, Russell, did you read about this Bridges guy up in San Francisco? Sounds like a red to me. What do you think?"

[00:42:58] **RUSSELL:** Well, I knew about him, of course. I appreciated his leadership after being around him.

[00:43:09] **HOWARD:** "Yeah, but Russell, he's just a Commie."

[00:43:12] **RUSSELL:** That didn't affect me and my work any.

[00:43:15] **HOWARD:** "You like Commies?"

[00:43:17] **RUSSELL:** I didn't object to them, if that's what you're meaning.

[00:43:21] **HOWARD:** That's what I'm getting at, so what I think may have happened during the strike is that a lot of the anti-Communism that people had going into it dissipated a little bit because they saw the people who were accused of being Communists who delivered.

[00:43:33] **RUSSELL:** Before the strike, I didn't know a Communist from a [unintelligible] _____, you know? [laughter]

[00:43:39] **HOWARD:** What happened during the strike? What did you learn?

[00:43:40] **RUSSELL:** Right after the strike was over, I learned about how if you're ever going to win is to stick together through unity. I think that's what everybody learned after the strike.

[00:44:01] **HOWARD:** What about politics itself? Does that mean unity with people who are accused of being radicals?

[00:44:07] **ELMER:** [unintelligible] _____. My impression of Bridges was, after hearing my dad talk a lot about him, for example, he's the greatest. My dad said, "You know why I like Bridges so much? He's an honest man. He comes through with his honesty and his leadership. He's not a pie card. Never has been." That's what impressed my father.

My father was from an old, old line of farming families that started in Illinois. He couldn't stand farming and he went to work for Anheuser-Busch in St. Louis about the time that they instituted the eight-hour day for the brewery workers. He was even a steward there for a while. He didn't care for inside work. He liked outside work.

Then he became a miner and he became a railroad man. Got mixed up in that '21 illegal strike from Santa Fe in New Mexico. The non-operating unions went out and the operators, some stayed on, some stayed out. My dad was one of the ones who came out in support. He got blackballed by all the railroads after that. That's how [unintelligible] ____ on San Pedro in 1923.

[00:45:54] **HOWARD:** So, in your father's case, it was that Bridges was an honest person. He had integrity.

[00:45:58] **ELMER:** Yes. That was the key word. He was honest to me. Then I'd read some of his statements and his speeches, they just seemed to appeal to something [?peace?] because even a little two-bit [unintelligible] ____ in San Pedro would be amazed at the anti-Communist politics that's going on [unintelligible] _____. It was fantastic.

But his speeches and his writings are what appealed to me because I believed in freedom. That was a basic thing with me. I was just beginning to learn [unintelligible] _____.

[00:46:49] **HOWARD:** Did Bridges make—like Russell, especially—did he make you more tolerant of left-wing ideas?

[00:46:56] **ELMER:** I never was intolerant. [laughing]

[00:46:58] **HOWARD:** How about Russell?

[00:46:59] **RUSSELL:** I don't know. Well, I probably told you before, I didn't know left-wing from right-wing until I got involved with [unintelligible] _____. I was going to school when I started here, and I was on the white boats on Saturday and Sunday. I would push a hand truck [unintelligible] _____. That was my first job on the [?Gale, the Gale Harbor?]. Big Jack Foster.

[00:47:31] **HOWARD:** Did it make you think about differences between left and right?

[00:47:37] **RUSSELL:** I didn't think much either way. All I was thinking about was [unintelligible] _____. [laughter] I don't even remember how much it pays.

[00:47:49] **HOWARD:** That's before the strike. Right?

[00:47:50] **RUSSELL:** Yeah.

[00:47:51] **HOWARD:** How about after? What I'm trying to get at is whether the strike had any impact on the way you looked at radical politics.

[00:48:01] **RUSSELL:** I've always been tolerant of what you call radical politics [?after what took place?] in the United States. The right wing [?relates itself to this?]. [unintelligible] _____.

The thing that appealed to me more was the logic of [unintelligible] _____. It was very logical. And as far as the religion goes, I had all my religion knocked out of me [laughter] when I was between 10 and 12. I attended parochial school and that did it for me. From then on, I've been anti-organized religion. I don't care what a person thinks privately.

But even then, the churches are coming out proclaiming against the Communist [unintelligible] _____ and its leadership and all. What the fuck. They're preachers. They get up in the pulpits and stuff like that. They join hands with the most corrupt politicians and the police. Even the Ku Klux Klan. There's no doubt there were preachers amongst them.

Getting up to the present, to me, the biggest danger facing our country today is these right-wing religionists, even more so than that tinsel Caesar we have up there, the fundamentalist.

[00:49:51] **HOWARD:** Yeah, right.

[00:49:57] **RUSSELL:** I want to reiterate I was never intolerant of these so-called left-wingers or the Communists.

[00:50:04] **HOWARD:** Do you think that other guys in the local who might have been more—you used the word non-progressive, anti-progressive—in other words, conservative guys—might have been changed as a result of the strike?

[00:50:16] **RUSSELL:** Yes.

[00:50:18] **HOWARD:** In what ways?

[00:50:20] **AL:** [unintelligible] _____. They have to find out what [unintelligible] _____. We all cherish that, using the democratic form to be elected to office. Because if it was a Joe Ryan or a Dave Beck union, why, when there were elections, it'd have been [unintelligible] _____.

[00:50:45] **HOWARD:** So, in your mind, you identified the left with democracy, as a democratic force in the union.

[00:50:52] **AL:** Sure.

[00:50:52] **HOWARD:** How about its politics apart from its democracy? In other words, its stand on foreign policies, or its stand about redistributing income in this country, or the need for labor unions.

[00:51:10] **AL:** Well, I think that redistributing wealth is all right. I think it should be done through taxation. Like the present administration, I don't [follow?] that the people that's got it, they're going to give more of it to them and take it away from the people that haven't got it. [unintelligible] ____ another year, or probably a consumption tax or a national sales tax, something along that order. That's probably the most regressive tax that we would have because that's taking away from the have-nots and putting it in the hands of people who have [unintelligible] ____.

[00:51:55] **HOWARD:** And you're pretty much of the same opinion that a number of guys were brought closer to the left as a result of the strike? I mean, did the left make an inroads during the '34 strike, in your opinion?

[00:52:09] **RUSSELL:** Did the left make inroads?

[00:52:12] **HOWARD:** Into the local of the longshoremen. Did it have a great influence?

[00:52:16] **RUSSELL:** Oh, yes. I wouldn't say it was the left, but more of the middlemen went left because prior to the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] coming in, everybody wanted to be in a craft union. After the CIO, it was who John L. Lewis instigated the idea of CIO. Then all the rights turned left. [chuckles] They could see the advantage of one big union. The CIO did have a hell of an impact on all the craft unions.

And, of course, ours was a craft union. The longshoremen was a craft union. You had holdmen, dockmen, jitney drivers, winch drivers, and hatchtenders, and there was some bosses. Each one of them wanted their own union.

[00:53:23] **AL:** That's right.

[00:53:24] **RUSSELL:** And now, even Pedro Pete advocated that. Pedro Pete wanted a union for the holdmen, a union for the [unintelligible] ____, a union for the winch drivers, a union for the hatch tenders, a union for bosses.

ELMER; And they did have that for a while, too.

To all intents and purposes.

[00:53:39] **ELMER:** Where they had a committee. You had to go to see this committee before you could be anything but a holeman.

[00:53:46] **RUSSELL:** Or a jitney driver or whatever.

[00:53:47] **ELMER:** Right.

[00:53:48] **AL:** Winch driver, jitney driver.

[00:53:50] **RUSSELL:** To [offload] lumber, you had to go in front of the Lumber Committee.

[00:53:52] **AL:** Right, the Lumber Board, and all of those guys had their own little union, and they had this clique, and you had to suck a lot of . . . balls to get into that little clique, too. They were as bad as the employer was until the CIO come in and said, “Look, that’s a bunch of shit. We’re all one union here.”

Of course, that was labeled as a left-wing set-up. When John L. Lewis started it, the CIO was very left-wing, and everybody wanted to go with him. So, they did have a big impact once the union was in there and established, and people could see what they could do by belonging to this union. Then they said, “This is a goddamned good thing. Let’s stay with it.” And that was their thinking.

Then, when they got the CIO, where the whole industry-wide was in one big union instead of having like the shipyard workers, where they had the scalers, the steamfitters, the boilermakers, the carpenters, welders and burners and electricians. All of these were all different unions, and when these people seen that . . . hmm . . . let’s go for it. That’s [?how we had a longshore union?].

[00:55:29] **ELMER:** We would have had a dozen unions on the waterfront, each one its own little clique of pie card artists and all that stuff competing against each other.

[00:55:38] **HOWARD:** You said in general the employers treated you like scum, they treated you like dogs, whatever the terms. Obviously, the employers treated people very poorly before '34. How much of an effect did you think that had on the men’s willingness to join the union, to build a union? If the employers had been nicer, do you think things would have gotten off the ground the same way?

[00:56:02] **RUSSELL:** No, probably not as fast.

[00:56:03] **ELMER:** No, no. Maybe eventually, but not as fast.

[00:56:08] **AL:** I think the greatest thing that ever happened here was during the 1936 strike. We had what they called the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. All the cooks and stewards, sailors, firemen, engineers, and I guess [unintelligible] ____, I don’t know. But they all stuck together. The employers couldn’t have worked a shift if they’d wanted to because those people all stuck together throughout the '36 strike.

[00:56:51] **HOWARD:** Yet, the Federation crumbled a few years later, didn’t it?

[00:56:54] **ELMER:** Yep, due to Harry Lundeberg. Joe Kern, that turncoat SOB. I was up at that convention.

[00:57:07] **AL:** Again, Harry Bridges had the number one book in the NMU [National Maritime Union].

[00:57:15] **HOWARD:** Bridges has the number one book in the NMU?

[00:57:17] **AL:** Right here, he started it. He advocated it to offset the SIU [Seafarers International Union], or SUP [Sailors’ Union of the Pacific], at that time. Because SUP was only deckmen, sailors. But NMU was cooks and stewards, firemen, oilers, water tenders and sailors. That was OBU—one big union—on the ship. The Sailor’s Union had just sailors. Hell, the goddamned NEBA or any of the rest of them could walk out and the sailors would still stay.

Harry helped Joe Kern organize and get this NMU started on the East Coast. Then they come over and picked up what ship they could on the West Coast. The people that wanted him [recording stopped at].

[END PART TWO/BEGIN PART THREE]

They got plenty [unintelligible] _____. [?Breezie's?] could have had the same [unintelligible] _____.

[00:58:29] **HOWARD:** In fact, there's documentation that they offered him money during the '34 strike. Matson admits that now. Matson offered him several thousand dollars.

[00:58:37] **ELMER:** That's common knowledge. He said, "I've got [?to pass the rank of Powell?], but I can take it."

[00:58:46] **HOWARD:** I want to return to this question I asked a little while ago about if the employers had acted differently what effect that would have had. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

[00:58:58] **ELMER:** I never thought of it in those terms until right now.

[00:59:02] **AL:** I never either because I didn't think the employers would ever, ever change because they were so arrogant that it was just impossible to imagine them being independent. We had bosses here, some bosses or superintendents of the individual companies, the Black Swede for one. [?An old bird?], for another, for [?Crescent?]. Those were good guys, but they were governed by that man up there that had the purse strings, and they couldn't be good people. They just couldn't be good people.

[00:59:46] **ELMER:** You just claimed they were good people.

[00:59:47] **AL:** Yeah, but as individuals holed up, Black Swede, hell, he would give you the shirt off his back as an individual. But you go down on the dock and he'd [unintelligible] ____ if you didn't put out. Same with old [?Bird Crescent?].

[01:00:05] **ELMER:** And [?Charlie Bacon?] and all of them.

[01:00:06] **AL:** Yeah.

[01:00:07] **ELMER:** Bob Booth and all of them.

[01:00:11] **HOWARD:** How did that affect the way you viewed the necessity of a union? I'm trying to see the relationship between employer responses and your responses, in other words.

[01:00:24] **ELMER:** Given the times that existed in 1934, I think that if the employers had approached the problem with us—is paternalism the right word?—through paternalism, and threw some crumbs at the guys so they could make a better living, and if they would relent on their absolute arrogance and domination, I think it would have set the union back down here by [?woodards?], I think the guys would have bought it at the time.

[01:01:06] **RUSSELL:** Remember the June 16 Agreement?

[01:01:07] **ELMER:** Yep.

[01:01:09] **RUSSELL:** They goddamn near bought that.

[01:01:11] **ELMER:** Yeah.

[01:01:12] **RUSSELL:** It was only 87 votes coastwise that kept them from accepting that June 16 Agreement, which was nothing, except back to work.

[01:01:26] **ELMER:** A complete sop.

[01:01:28] **RUSSELL:** Right.

[01:01:28] **ELMER:** It was only defeated by a handful of votes.

[01:01:31] **RUSSELL:** Eighty-seven coastwise.

[01:01:37] **HOWARD:** I didn't know that.

[01:01:40] **RUSSELL:** That was one thing that always stuck in my mind how close—

[01:01:45] **ELMER:** I think San Pedro defeated it.

[01:01:47] **AL:** Not Frisco?

[01:01:48] **ELMER:** No. I mean, San Pedro bought it.

[01:01:53] **AL:** Right.

[01:01:53] **ELMER:** San Francisco was the one that defeated the June 16 Agreement.

[01:01:57] **RUSSELL:** Of course, you have to go to Bridges on that. It was his leadership and his policy in San Francisco that turned the tide there. Of course, when Ryan came out of here and tried to sell that June 16 Agreement to it, he never got to the Pacific Northwest. They took him out and lost him. He never did get to the Pacific Northwest to make a speech.

Matt Meehan and some of them guys couldn't find Portland for nothing. They got lost between LA, San Francisco and Portland. He came down here, Ryan. I went to his speech in San Pedro High School, the June 16 meeting that they had there on the boat.

I never got in the boat, but I went to that meeting. Bob Wilson and I went to that meeting, and Harry Lee [?Hallbrig and Allen and Limey?]. We all went together.

[01:03:15] **ELMER:** [?Limey Lyons?]?

[01:03:16] **RUSSELL:** Yeah. And when we come out of there, every one of us said, "Jesus Christ! What a sellout." We live right over here at 777 6th Street. We were out there at the school, and we argued all the way home.

Of course, [?Harry Lee?], he had his brains knocked out when he was in the ring. He was for it. "Let's go back to work. Let's go back to work." [?Elmer Allen?], he didn't know. Limey. "I got a home up here [?with about 12 people?] and I've got my cellar full of wine. I'm having a good time. Let's don't accept this thing."

Of course, Bob and I didn't have any say about it, but [?thin tree?] had votes. I guess it was maybe two to one for it.

[01:04:30] **ELMER:** Yeah. I wasn't at that meeting.

[01:04:35] **RUSSELL:** It was awful close. And, you know, when you heard that speech not knowing too much about the waterfront—

[01:04:46] **HOWARD:** This is Ryan speaking, you mean?

[01:04:49] **RUSSELL:** Yeah. And Pedro Pete, he made a speech, too.

[01:04:53] **ELMER:** He was a rabble-rouser.

[01:04:55] **RUSSELL:** Yeah, and he was the international organizer. That's all he was. Bob Patterson was the president, Elmer Bruce was the secretary, and Jack Edwardson was the business agent. Of course, they were all kissing old Joe Ryan's butt. They were trying to sell that thing. Really trying to sell it. I guess maybe there was more people voted for it here than was against it, but Frisco, 87 [?worked?] on the coast turned it down.

[01:05:39] **HOWARD:** Did anyone speak out against the June 16 Agreement at that meeting?

[01:05:43] **RUSSELL:** Bridges did, in Frisco.

[01:05:44] **HOWARD:** Yeah, how about here in Pedro?

[01:05:46] **RUSSELL:** No.

[01:05:49] **ELMER:** The fringe forces, the left-wing, they put out bulletins and so forth appealing to the rank-and-file longshoremen that the whole thing was a set-up. But it still carried in this port.

[01:06:03] **HOWARD:** Didn't make much of an impact, apparently.

[01:06:05] **ELMER:** No.

[01:06:06] **RUSSELL:** And I don't know. It was pretty close in the Pacific Northwest where he never did get to.

[01:06:15] **HOWARD:** Are you sure about that 87 vote coastwide total?

[01:06:18] **RUSSELL:** That's in the archives.

[01:06:22] **HOWARD:** I thought it was overwhelmingly turned down and that it just barely passed in Pedro.

[01:06:25] **ELMER:** No, no, no. It was very close.

[01:06:27] **RUSSELL:** When was that—we turned some other one down here.

[01:06:33] **ELMER:** That was in '71. Not one man showed up to vote.

[01:06:39] **HOWARD:** Yeah, right, I remember that.

[01:06:39] **RUSSELL:** That was in '48.

[01:06:39] **ELMER:** It was '48, yeah.

[01:06:40] **RUSSELL:** I was watching the vote.

[01:06:40] **ELMER:** Yeah, 1948 it was. In 1971, there was only about five percent of the people who voted.

[01:06:51] **RUSSELL:** Yeah, and they turned that contract down.

[01:06:55] **ELMER:** The '47 one.

[01:06:57] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I've seen the '48 totals. They showed the National Labor Relations Board number eligible to vote.

[01:07:02] **AL:** L. B. Thomas, Albert Valdez, and I, were the three. We were the watchers when they had that Labor Relations vote in there. Not one man come in to vote.

[01:07:25] **RUSSELL:** That's right. Not one man on the entire coast.

[01:07:29] **HOWARD:** Let me move ahead in time to the Second World War. I talked extensively with you about the war and somewhat when we were in the union hall there. It seems like there was a lot of patriotic rhetoric to do your sacrifice, do your bit for the war effort. Was that pretty much how it was in the union, that people were willing to put out?

[01:07:52] **RUSSELL:** Oh, yes. Yeah.

[01:07:52] **AL:** We never got a penny raise during the war.

[01:07:56] **HOWARD:** And yet, the union didn't bend over backwards—or did it? Did the union completely give up its work rules?

[01:08:04] **AL:** No, no, no.

[01:08:05] **RUSSELL:** No. The Army even assisted us in that, especially at Long Beach. Some of the Army guys at the top. All they would have been was getting the stuff out, but they didn't want to violate any safety rules because they were very [?insistent?] on that because if a man got hurt or brought a boom down, that meant [unintelligible] _____. But the Army was very cooperative overall.

[01:08:36] **AL:** They were.

[01:08:37] **RUSSELL:** No, we didn't give up any work [unintelligible] _____. But at that time, it did accelerate the introduction of labor safety devices.

[01:08:44] **AL:** Oh, yeah.

[01:08:46] **RUSSELL:** Lift with knees. Stockpiling. Stuff like that. That was the first indication of what was to come.

[01:08:59] **AL:** Pre-palletized cargo.

[01:09:05] **HOWARD:** So, men made sacrifices on an individual basis. Is that pretty much how it worked?

[01:09:11] **RUSSELL:** Well, in this way. They turned to, except these money-hungry outfits, like Manning, at one time had 99 percent of these carpenters corralled on a cost-plus basis. You couldn't get a carpenter for any of these docks hardly unless Manning said, "Okay." Isn't that right?

[01:09:35] **AL:** Right.

[01:09:35] **RUSSELL:** It was worked on a cost-plus basis, and their efficiency was much less than other [unintelligible] _____.

[01:09:41] **AL:** Oh, yeah, it was awful.

[01:09:43] **RUSSELL:** Because the other places, the guys would [?turn too?]. In fact, they'd be chastised severely by [?gobsters?] and so forth as they were jogging. They even advocated the idea of the longshore labor battalions and so forth.

[01:10:03] **HOWARD:** Was it an individual decision to put forth that effort? I'm trying to get at the idea, in other words, the union didn't give up its work rules, did it?

[01:10:18] **AL:** Oh, no.

[01:10:19] **HOWARD:** So, the men retained their work rules.

[01:10:21] **RUSSELL:** Oh, yes.

[01:10:22] **HOWARD:** Any yet, if they wanted to sacrifice, they did it on an individual basis?

[01:10:25] **RUSSELL:** Yeah, we could have worked 10 hours a day, for example.

[01:10:30] **AL:** Seven days a week. Twenty-eight a month.

[01:10:34] **ELMER:** You felt unpatriotic if you didn't.

[01:10:38] **AL:** And then, of course, you were short of men. Very short of men in this port. In Frisco, they had [unintelligible] _____ up there called dock seamen. They were not longshoremen. They were working under the Army more or less. They used to do a lot of dock work, not on board a ship, except they used to come in and clean out the ships. It was our work to clean the ship when it come in from overseas, and to get the ship ready to load out again.

But those guys—and they had 10,000 of them guys up in San Francisco, and they had about 10,000 longshoremen in San Francisco. The most men we ever had in this port was 6,000 men. This port damn near done as much tonnage as Frisco. Of course, Frisco had two, three military docks—14th Street in Oakland, Fort Mason in Frisco, 44th Pier and Alameda. They had those three and all the military cargo went out there.

Here, the whole fort was military cargo. When the war first started, this was not a port of embarkation. Not an ounce of military cargo went out of here for over a year. All they run in this port at that time was the banana boats. They were building the Pan-Am [erican] Highway, and I guess most of these guys went from the shipyard. The banana boats, I think one boat a week. They would load out with cargo for the Pan-Am Highway and come in with a load of bananas. I don't know where them bananas come from. Guatemala, Honduras or where. Costa Rica, Nicaragua. Someplace in there.

Then they would take this cargo down there. That's [unintelligible] _____ in this port at that time. I went to Frisco in January of '42.

[01:13:14] **RUSSELL:** I did, too.

[01:13:14] **AL:** And I stayed there till March of '43. I come back then when they said, "Either transfer or come home." There was absolutely [?doing?] this port until it was declared a port of embarkation. Then, when it was declared a port of embarkation, you couldn't get enough men.

In '43 when I came back, I got the job of registering the men on the temporary basis, what they call warehouse workers.

[01:13:55] **ELMER:** Excuse me, I've got to go.

[01:13:56] **HOWARD:** I wanted to ask you a question before you left. You said the men really turned to. Was the work accelerated during the war? Did you have to work faster?

[01:14:04] **ELMER:** In this sense. The introduction of labor safety devices. The techniques, pre-palletized cargo. Cargo that was [?tied deep in high piles?], and stuff like that. The jitneys come in and start doing a lot of that work because it's all prepackaged [unintelligible] ____ and so forth. It wasn't that more extra work on it except the longer hours.

[01:14:34] **AL:** But the Army cargo was—

[01:14:36] **ELMER:** Except cement.

[01:14:40] **AL:** They never did get anything but that. But only the Army cargo was all crated when it came to the port. It was ready to ship. All the rolling stock, hell, we never crated them, of course. Those were just put in and rolled and stowed in the wings. But the jeeps and things like that, all of that stuff was already crated, so it was fast. You could handle that stuff fast because you just pulled it off of them and then put it down [unintelligible] _____. You could take a whole shipload of jeeps till it'd get so high. Then you'd put [?roller stock?] on top of that.

[01:15:37] **HOWARD:** Interesting point as Elmer was leaving the room about the cement bags. Do you remember a controversy around handling cement sacks? I think at one point, the Pacific Coast Maritime Industry Board wanted to increase the number of sacks per load. Do you remember that?

[01:15:52] **AL:** Oh, yeah. When the Army loaded a ship, they put two or three tons on [unintelligible] _____.
[01:16:01] **HOWARD:** Of cement?

[01:16:01] **AL:** Of cement. That's up to 40, 50 sacks of cement on [unintelligible] _____. We said, "No, no. We've got to load all that stuff [?instead of 2100 pallets?], you ain't going to put more than twenty-one sacks on the load, no matter whether it's [unintelligible] _____, our load limit is going to be fat."

[01:16:23] **HOWARD:** Let me play the devil's advocate with you. I'm the Army and I say, "Aren't you guys patriotic? Don't you want to do your part for the war effort?"

[01:16:31] **AL:** Look, this is not Army important cargo. This is not an emergency cargo. These other things, like jeeps and that, we'll take a more overload of the load on them, but they're packaged. But a stack of cement is 100 pounds. We're only going to put 2,100 pounds on that load.

[01:16:59] **HOWARD:** I'm the Army and I say, "How do you know what's important? It's all important for our fighting boys overseas. We're running this operation. You want to help us or not?"

[01:17:07] **AL:** Yes, but our load limit is 2,100 pounds and that's it. That's what we told them.

[01:17:15] **RUSSELL:** Did you ever work in Redwood City?

[01:17:17] **AL:** Oh, yes.

[01:17:17] **RUSSELL:** Oh, my gawd.

[01:17:20] **AL:** That come out of the mill so hot that you couldn't handle it.

[01:17:22] **HOWARD:** What were you handling?

[01:17:24] **AL:** Cement.

[01:17:24] **RUSSELL:** Hot cement.

[01:17:26] **HOWARD:** How come it's hot? Was it in the kiln drying?

[01:17:30] **AL:** When it come out of the dryer.

[01:17:30] **HOWARD:** Okay.

[01:17:30] **RUSSELL:** And the Army needed it. It's meant for construction overseas.

[01:17:34] **AL:** That was when they was sending stuff to Hawaii, putting it in . . . you know, putting fortifications in Hawaii. There was a lot of cement went to them. Then the goddamned Frisco people picked up that cement.

[01:17:55] **RUSSELL:** Oh, no. No way. Gawd, that was the worst job I ever had.

[01:18:00] **HOWARD:** Why? You mean because it was so hot to handle?

[01:18:01] **RUSSELL:** It was not only hot, it was dusty. They gave us a thin mask that didn't do a thing. You'd cough up clinkers for a week out of your sinuses, out of your throat.

[01:18:12] **HOWARD:** Actually clinkers?

[01:18:13] **AL:** Yeah, when you got a lot of cement, it gets in a ball and gets in your throat. Them Friscos, they were damnedest port I ever seen. Now, here, we had a cement job, we put our four-wheeled trucks in our hold and we'd put loads on that and put it to the face of our work. Frisco, they'd build a table in the middle of the hatch and they'd take every sack, one by one, and carry it all over the ship, and build it up eight, 10.

[01:18:52] **RUSSELL:** They'd build runways [?for steel plate?] and stuff.

[01:18:57] **HOWARD:** Although in terms of productivity, you guys, according to the government, were not as productive in Pedro as in San Francisco during the war. They claim that output per man there was higher in San Francisco than in San Pedro.

[01:19:09] **RUSSELL:** Where'd you get those statistics?

[01:19:11] **HOWARD:** I don't remember offhand. They're in here.

[01:19:13] **AL:** I worked in both ports, and back then, Pedro had a higher tonnage than Frisco.

[01:19:21] **HOWARD:** Did they?

[01:19:22] **AL:** Oh, yeah.

[01:19:22] **RUSSELL:** I would [unintelligible] _____. I worked in Frisco for eight months during that period.

[01:19:27] **AL:** And I worked for a year up there and I worked every kind of cargo in that port, cement to TNT.

[01:19:37] **HOWARD:** Why did you guys decide to draw the line on cement? You were willing to take heavier loads, like handling jeeps or tanks or something, but you drew the line on cement. Why?

[01:19:46] **AL:** You had to handle that on them trucks, and you can't handle more than 2,100 pounds on a four-wheeler on a runway.

[01:19:55] **HOWARD:** The Army didn't agree with that.

[01:19:57] **RUSSELL:** Especially if you had to go uphill.

[01:19:58] **AL:** Yeah.

[01:20:00] **RUSSELL:** Gawd.

[01:20:00] **AL:** Before you get in the rake of the ship, it goes up in the bow, and you can't build that rake out.

[01:20:08] **HOWARD:** Okay, so you're telling me it had to do with safety or technical reasons, not traditions of the union so much.

[01:20:14] **AL:** Well, it was safety and health. We didn't think it did our health any good to take 22 sacks when you was only supposed to take out twenty-one.

[01:20:24] **HOWARD:** Last time we talked about this, I think you said that you also felt that if you'd given in to the employers on that point, you would have had to give in on a whole bunch more.

[01:20:32] **RUSSELL:** Right.

[01:20:32] **HOWARD:** And that's a different kind of an argument, isn't it? Because that's saying that it's not so much the question of safety or anything, it's a question of principle.

[01:20:40] **AL:** We were scared of a precedent, for one thing.

[01:20:42] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[01:20:44] **AL:** Because them employers set a lot of precedents themselves, which was they didn't care if only one man worked in a hatch during the war as long as they had eight men on the payroll. Well, we carried that over after the war was over, and we worked four on and four off. That's why we were afraid that if we gave them 28 or 30 sacks on [?a border?] of cement that they would insist on it after the war.

[01:21:17] **HOWARD:** Okay, so those are union traditions that are preventing you from going beyond twenty-one sacks. Right?

[01:21:22] **RUSSELL:** Right.

[01:21:23] **AL:** Oh, yes, that was a union position, not individual.

[01:21:26] **HOWARD:** Okay.

[01:21:28] **AL:** And I think that [?our trader?] that and our trader agreed with us.

[01:21:35] **RUSSELL:** During the war was when we got that arbitration on a 10-cent differential on all sacks. They used to only give it to you on cloth sacks.

[01:21:46] **AL:** Yeah.

[01:21:46] **RUSSELL:** When we had that arbitration, we got it on paper sacks, too, because they was just as dusty as the ones in cloth sacks.

[01:21:56] **AL:** Did they give you a mask in Redwood City?

[01:22:02] **RUSSELL:** Yeah, a little flimsy thing.

[01:22:03] **AL:** They never—

[01:22:04] **RUSSELL:** I threw it away because I couldn't breathe with it on.

[01:22:07] **AL:** You know what? I've got some of them out in my shop there yet. A tin with those cheesecloth [hot pieces?].

[01:22:16] **HOWARD:** You saved them all those years?

[01:22:18] **AL:** Yep.

[01:22:20] **RUSSELL:** Anybody [unintelligible] _____.

[01:22:22] **HOWARD:** Really, I think so. [laughter]

[01:22:26] **AL:** We never got no masks in Redwood City. I only went there twice.

[01:22:30] **RUSSELL:** Maybe [unintelligible] _____. myself. I don't know. I forget whether it was issued or not.

[01:22:34] **AL:** I got sucked in the first time. We didn't know what was out there. And the next time the ship shifted over to there and we had to go with it because we couldn't get [unintelligible] _____. But, oh, every time I used to go to Frisco and passed Redwood City, it made me sick to smell that cement.

[01:22:58] **RUSSELL:** They don't carry load sacks anymore. I think it's all shipped in bulk.

[01:23:01] **AL:** It is. Now, it's all bulk.

[01:23:02] **HOWARD:** I was raised in Redwood City. I should tell you that. [laughter] I remember that place that's out there by the waterfront, though, that cement place.

[01:23:10] **AL:** That Redwood City cement place?

[01:23:14] **HOWARD:** Yeah.

[01:23:14] **RUSSELL:** That's [unintelligible] _____, my estimation was, after cement. It was rawhides.

[laughing]

[01:23:21] **HOWARD:** I've heard about those, yeah.

[01:23:22] **RUSSELL:** And shoveling [?meledrum?] ore. Oh, my gawd!

[01:23:29] **AL:** One [unintelligible] _____ I never would take was sulfur.

[01:23:34] **RUSSELL:** Sulfur, I worked, but—

[01:23:35] **HOWARD:** Was it because the odor of sulfur is so bad? Is that the problem?

[01:23:39] **RUSSELL:** The least spark would set a fire off.

[01:23:40] **AL:** Not only that but the next day, you couldn't open your eyes.

[01:23:43] **RUSSELL:** Right.

[01:23:45] **AL:** It gets in your eyes and, boy, it was killing you. There was nothing—

[01:23:49] **RUSSELL:** If there was a spark, there would be a little fire started. You'd stamp it out and there would be a dozen started. It was terrible.

[01:24:00] **HOWARD:** Was that a penalty card or did you get more money for working it?

[01:24:02] **AL:** Oh, yeah. Ten cents an hour for that.

[01:24:13] **HOWARD:** That's not much.

[01:24:13] **AL:** All [unintelligible] _____ was 10 cents an hour more. Cement was 10 cents an hour more.

[END PART THREE]